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NEWS RELEASE

USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT HOSTS A WATER AND SEWER SERVICE CONFERENCE TO BENEFIT RURAL RESIDENTS

The ninth annual Water and Waste Conference was recently held in Columbia, Missouri for over 170 consulting engineers, regional planning commissions, community planners, grant writers and other consultants from across Missouri. Many local, state and federal officials were also in attendance. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss water and sewer opportunities for residents and communities in rural Missouri. The programs are delivered through a partnership of federal, state and local partners working together to assist rural areas of Missouri.

Gregory C. Branum, State Director for USDA Rural Development, said, "The success of helping rural citizens is dependent upon the partnering with professional engineers, planners, and other consultants. This conference explained the mission of Rural Development and the commitment to target financial and technical resources in areas of greatest need through activities of greatest potential. Funding environmentally safe water and wastewater systems mirrors one of President Bush's initiatives and exemplifies the Rural Development mission – committed to the future of rural communities".

The partners participating in the conference included the Missouri Department of Economic Development Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (Public Drinking Water, Water Pollution and State Revolving Fund), Missouri Rural Water Association (MRWA), Midwest Assistance Program (MAP), and USDA Rural Development.

Jim Maras, Director of the Water Programs for USDA Rural Development in Washington DC discussed the importance of partnering to stretch shrinking federal and state funds to meet the needs of rural residents. He further discussed the preliminary funding levels for 2006 and the commitment of Rural Development to help rural communities and rural residents.

Clark Thomas, Rural Development Director of the Business and Community Programs, discussed some of Rural Development's policies and funding for this fiscal year. He stated, "The Missouri Water & Wastewater Review Committee partner to insure all available funds in Missouri are utilized to assist as many communities as possible. Even with limited loan and grant funds, financing should continue to be directed to the smallest communities with the lowest incomes with priority given to utilization of grants in areas lacking running water, flush toilets and modern sewage disposal systems." He emphasized that we must be sure we are not duplicating services where communities can share services, such as water sources and treatment of water and sewage. With the reduction of grant funds from all state and Federal agencies, user rates may need to be higher than in previous years.

Thomas further stated, "The engineers, the regional planning commissions, the grant writers, and others in attendance are key partners working on the team to help deserving communities reach the goal of having essential water and sewer systems."

Ed Galbraith, Director of Water Protection Program for Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) presented the new organizational chart and talked about the current reorganizational plans to better serve the residents in Missouri. He discussed current policies and gave an insight on upcoming changes in standards for water and sewer systems.

Daniel Garcia, Missouri USDA Rural Development Engineer, lead a discussion on meeting wastewater treatment challenges. Cary Sayre of Allstate Consultants and Ray West of Hood Rich Engineers, talked about ways to meet current regulations.

Several other key partners in helping rural communities with water and sewer projects were in attendance and made presentations including: Midwest Assistance Program represented by Linda Cyrus, Rural Development Specialist; the Missouri Rural Water Association represented by Mike Hollis, Wastewater Training Specialist; Missouri Department of Natural Resources including Carrie Schulte and David Uhlig. Sallie Hemenway, Director of Operations for the Missouri Department of Economic Development (DED), discussed DED's reorganization, the Community Development Block Grant Program(CDBG) and the Missouri Water and Wastewater Review Committee.

Anyone seeking more information about the Water and Waste programs or any other USDA Rural Development programs may visit the Homepage at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/mo/> or by contacting your [local Rural Development office](#).

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